

North Creek Community Farm

Newsletter

Tuesday, June 24, 2010

Week Three

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CSA Organizing

There has been a running debate about creating a CSA organization that would support farmers and help promote CSAs in the Twin Cities area. The devil is in the details as to what exactly this organization would control and regulate. It seems to divide along the lines of farmers, like myself, who see CSAs as a model for a new relationship between the produce and eater that builds community, educates people and adds depth to the usual procurement of food. Other farmers see it as mostly a unique marketing model that benefits both the producer and consumer but is mostly about securing an income for the farmer.

Each year there are stories of disgruntled members who did not enjoy being part of a CSA for a variety of reasons. Sometimes they were not prepared for the reality of cooking and dealing with the amount of vegetables. Occasionally a farmer has trouble providing an interesting, varied and adequate share. These farmers are sometimes new farmers who are on the steep learning curve and sometimes it is more experienced farms that send their best produce to the wholesale market and don't give the CSA the attention it deserves.

This year there are over 60 CSAs in the Twin Cities region where there were only 42 last year. Many of the established farms have added shares and this has left farm with un-sold shares. The question for the organizers of a guild or farm group would be whether to have requirements for membership in a "professional" organization that would help guarantee the success of the operations. Standards would be imposed such as irrigation and a certain amount of experience. These are important questions and they have elicited much heated debates. Right now things have died down as we all work hard to produce this summer's bounty. We will head back to the debate as time opens up in the winter.

In the bag:

Spinach and Arugula Mix

Cilantro

Lettuce – only one head

Green onions

Chard

Popcorn

Garlic Scapes

What I would do with the vegetables:

I love cilantro. It's a love hate thing. For some people, it tastes like soap. Not for me. I chop the leaves and put massive amounts on a bean burrito or put it in a good tortilla soup. The popcorn is easy to shell if you break the cobs in half and gently but forcefully grind them against each other over a bowl. To pop, I heat some oil in a pan and as it starts to heat, add a few kernels. When these pop, add the rest of the corn and shake continuously back and forth over the heat. When the first kernels pop, cover with a metal sieve to let steam escape. Continue to shake until active popping stops then dump in a bowl.

There are some chard recipes from members on the back of the letter.

Garlic scapes can be used just like regular garlic. It just has a greener taste. We tried baking some in a 325-degree oven. Coat with olive oil and sprinkle on salt. Cook about 20 minutes until tender.

Storage tips: (Thanks for the reminder Jennifer)

Chard and lettuce need to be kept in the fridge. If they are too wet, they get gooey. Wash when you are ready to use them. Garlic scapes last quite a while as long as they are in a plastic bag. The refrigerator is a very dry environment. Cilantro too is fleeting and has to be used within about 5 days. I like green onions in a pasta salad with chopped chard and a good dressing. I like to make a Caesar dressing. Bits of garlic scapes would be good in there too.

Recipes

Braised Chard

Ingredients

- 1 pound Swiss chard
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic, sliced
- 1/4 cup chopped scallions
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Preparation

1. Rinse the Swiss chard. Leave any water clinging to it. Chop it fine.
2. Heat the oil in a large skillet. Add the garlic, sauté for a minute or so, and then add the Swiss chard. Cook, stirring, until the Swiss chard begins to wilt. Cover the pan and cook over low heat for about 15 minutes.
3. Uncover and cook, stirring, a few minutes longer. Stir in the scallions; season to taste with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with cheese and serve.

YIELD

4 to 6 servings

BRIGHT LIGHTS CHARD GRATIN

Local Flavors, Deborah Madison Serves 4 as main, 6 as side

2 # Swiss chard, including 1/2 of stems

4 T butter

1 onion, finely chopped

Sea salt & black pepper

1 c fresh breadcrumbs

1 clove garlic, minced or several garlic scapes

3 T chopped fresh dill or parsley

1 T flour

1 cup milk, cream or a mixture of cream & stock

1 c crumbled goat cheese

Separate leaves from chard stems. Wash leaves & coarsely chop. Trim edges off half the stems & dice into small pieces. Melt 2 T butter in a wide skillet over medium heat. Add onion & chard stems, and cook about 20 minutes, until onion is browning a bit. Add chard leaves and 1 teaspoon salt, & cook until wilted, about 10 minutes. Preheat oven to 400. Lightly oil a 2 qt casserole dish. Melt 1 T butter in a small skillet & add breadcrumbs, garlic & herb. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute, then scrape crumbs from pan & return to heat. Melt last T butter in pan, stir in flour & cook for 1-2 minutes, then slowly whisk in milk to make a roux. Simmer for 5 minutes; season with 1/2 t salt. Add to chard mixture. Add cheese, and taste to correct seasonings. Pour chard mix into casserole dish & cover with breadcrumbs. Bake 25 minutes & let settle a bit before serving.